

North Carolina



NORTH CAROLINA'S "NC READY" REFORM

agenda builds on and leverages the considerable strengths and resources of the state's early learning and development systems, while advancing carefully selected strategies to dramatically improve outcomes for children, especially those with high needs. The reform agenda has four major areas of focus:

- To strengthen the state's early childhood system and build its capacity to foster positive results for young children.
- To enhance the access to and quality of programs that serve young children and their families.
- To strengthen the early childhood workforce to increase staff and system effectiveness and sustain change.
- To target high-intensity supports and community infrastructure-building efforts to turn around poor outcomes for young children in the highest need counties through the establishment of a Transformation Zone.

North Carolina will use its existing Early Childhood Advisory Council, its local Smart Start infrastructure, and the participation and cooperation of a wide range of state and local stakeholders to create a Transformation Zone made up of a set of rural, distressed counties with high needs in northeastern North Carolina. Transformation Zone communities will be supported through (1) community building, (2) infrastructure development, and (3) implementation of evidence-based programs and practices. This effort will demonstrate the efficacy of an intensive, comprehensive approach to providing services and also build the knowledge and infrastructure needed to scale up these efforts in other parts of the state. North Carolina addressed the following Focused Investment Areas in its application:

Applicant

Office of the Governor,
State of North Carolina

Lead Agency

Early Childhood Advisory
Council

Contact Information

Lucy Roberts
Lucy.roberts@nc.gov

Total Federal Award

\$69,991,121

Grant Period

January 1, 2012 –
December 31, 2015

The Race to the Top – Early Learning Challenge (RTT-ELC) discretionary grant program supports states in building statewide systems that raise the quality of early learning and development programs and increase access to high-quality programs for children with high needs, so that all children enter kindergarten ready to succeed.

Information in this abstract is drawn from the state's RTT-ELC grant application.

*Early Learning
and
Development
Standards*

(C)(1) Developing and using statewide, high-quality early learning and development standards. North Carolina has started a collaborative effort with early childhood and K12 leaders to strengthen birth to 5 standards and augment K-3 standards to include school readiness domains. A broad array of professional development opportunities (preservice and inservice) will reach families, the early childhood workforce, pediatricians, and others who work with young children to build awareness of the new early learning standards and how to use them.

*Comprehensive
Assessment
System*

(C)(2) Supporting effective uses of comprehensive assessment systems. North Carolina will develop a comprehensive assessment system that is coordinated across early learning programs. It will build appropriate assessment of young children into its tiered quality rating and improvement system (TQRIS) and provide the professional development and supports needed to ensure that the early childhood workforce uses assessment information appropriately to inform the instruction of children. North Carolina will develop a coordinated assessment approach across various early learning programs, beyond those included in the TQRIS.

*Health
Promotion*

(C)(3) Identifying and addressing the health, behavioral, and developmental needs of children with high needs to improve school readiness. North Carolina will build upon the robust health and safety standards built into its licensing system as requirements for all early learning programs. A large network of child care health consultants provides onsite technical assistance and helps develop policies and environments to promote children's health and development. The state PreK program has policies for screening young children in coordination with medical providers. The RTT-ELC grant will support efforts to strengthen North Carolina's approach to assessment, ensuring that children who are screened are then referred for services.

*Family
Engagement*

(C)(4) Engaging and supporting families. North Carolina has made public and private investments in home visiting and evidence-based family strengthening programs. The grant will expand efforts to include family engagement and support in our TQRIS program standards, and to align TQRIS standards with those of Head Start.

*Support
Workforce
Improvement*

(D)(2) Supporting early childhood educators in improving their knowledge, skills, and abilities. North Carolina's professional development system has been created and refined in response to deliberate efforts to collect data on the workforce and on the effectiveness of various strategies designed to improve the quality of and access to professional development. Multiple workforce studies have provided data on the education, compensation, demographics, workplace supports, professional development needs, and turnover of the early childhood workforce, which has been used to create strategies to promote system-wide improvements. Grant funds will support and expand upon these efforts.

*Kindergarten
Entry
Assessment*

(E)(1) Understanding the status of children’s learning and development at kindergarten entry. Currently, school districts use various measures to assess kindergarten students, and the data are not included in any local or state database. The RTT-ELC grant will provide the resources needed to implement a kindergarten entry assessment (KEA) that is reliable, valid, aligned with early learning and development standards, and included in the state longitudinal data system.

*Build or
Enhance Data
Systems*

(E)(2) Building or enhancing an early learning data system to improve instruction, practices, services, and policies. North Carolina has already completed important initial planning and preparation for an integrated early childhood data system that is linked with the K12 state longitudinal data system. Statewide leadership from the Early Childhood Advisory Council will develop critical policy questions, policies, and procedures for building the data system. Grant funds will support the design and implementation of the system, which will provide information about children, workforce, and program quality and will support data- driven decisionmaking.

North Carolina has 373,968 children, birth to kindergarten entry, from low-income families. The state reports that it is leveraging \$1,319,900 in other funding sources to support this effort.